

Campus Journalists' Aspirations and Lived Experiences Amid Limited Media Education Pathways in Samar, Philippine

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Article Information

History:

Received 18AUG2025

Final Revision 29NOV2025

Accepted 12DEC2025

Keyword

Campus Journalism

Student Journalists

Media Aspirations

Narrative Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Abstract: Campus journalism is instrumental in cultivating students' competencies in writing, reporting, and civic engagement. In the Philippines, campus journalism is institutionalized as both an academic and civic pursuit through a Republic Act. Nevertheless, in Samar province, prospective student journalists encounter structural obstacles, notably the lack of journalism or media-related degree programs in local higher education institutions. This study investigates the lived experiences and aspirations of nine student journalists from basic and tertiary schools in Samar, supplemented by perspectives from two experienced campus journalism mentors. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through open-ended narrative interviews and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, with narrative analysis applied to identify individual turning points and processes of meaning-making. Four primary themes emerged: (1) external influences and internal motivations, (2) aspirations and realities in media futures, (3) barriers to accessing journalism education, and (4) adaptive strategies in pursuing media aspirations. The findings indicate that campus journalism supports identity formation, self-expression, and advocacy; however, students' career ambitions are constrained by limited academic offerings, financial barriers, and geographic isolation. Despite these impediments, students engage with alternative platforms such as school publications, online content creation, and community media to maintain their involvement. The study underscores the necessity for institutional reforms, including the expansion of local journalism programs, provision of scholarships, and enhancement of alternative media platforms to promote equitable access to journalism education and foster youth aspirations.

1. Introduction

Campus journalism provides students with opportunities to develop skills in writing, reporting, and civic engagement. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 7079 and DepEd Order No. 94, s. 1992, reinforce the importance of campus journalism in fostering ethical media practices, youth expression, and early career exploration. In

Samar, student journalists participate in school publications and press conferences, frequently cultivating aspirations for careers in media (Dela Rosa et al., 2021; Gevers, 2022). Recent research demonstrates that involvement in campus journalism enhances students' communication competence, critical thinking, and career awareness in media-related fields (Almaden, 2020; Cabigon, 2023).

These aspirations are constrained by the lack of journalism or communication programs in local higher education institutions. Although students receive a strong foundation in basic education, they encounter limited opportunities to pursue formal media studies, which often results in the redirection or abandonment of initial career goals. Some students maintain their interest through alternative platforms, including college publications, online writing, or community media engagement (Gever, 2022; Cabigon, 2023). Research on career development indicates that restricted access to relevant educational pathways can significantly affect students' career decisions and persistence, particularly in underserved or geographically isolated regions (Lent & Brown, 2020; OECD, 2021).

While existing literature underscores the benefits of campus journalism, there remains a critical gap in understanding how student journalists in geographically constrained contexts, such as Samar, navigate their aspirations in the absence of accessible academic pathways. Most recent studies focus on skill development and media engagement, with limited attention to students' lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and long-term aspirations amid structural educational limitations (Almaden, 2020; Cabigon, 2023). Addressing this gap is essential to bridge the disconnect between early journalistic engagement and sustained career pathways in media.

Anchored in this context, the present study examines the lived experiences and future aspirations of young journalists in Samar. Through a qualitative descriptive approach utilizing thematic and narrative analysis, it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how these students engage with journalism, respond to limited

opportunities, and sustain their vision for a career in media. Ultimately, the insights aim to inform the development of more inclusive academic pathways and responsive support systems that will nurture and sustain emerging voices in journalism.

2. Objectives

This study aimed to explore, capture, and describe the lived experiences and aspirations of Samar young journalists as they navigate challenges such as the limited access to journalism-related college programs in the locale.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative and descriptive research design to explore the experiences and views of campus journalists and mentors. It combined narrative analysis to capture the depth of individual stories with thematic analysis to identify common patterns among participants.

Participants and Sampling

The study included participants chosen from different schools in Samar. Inclusion criteria include a student journalist with an adviser who must have 4 to 8 years of experience in campus journalism and actively participated in school publications or media groups. The student participants must have held various roles, such as radio reporter, TV anchor, video editor, cartoonist, photojournalist, and editorial writer. This targeted sampling ensured rich and meaningful narratives related to the study's focus on journalistic goals and educational challenges.

Data Collection

An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was utilized to gather the data through Google Forms. This format enabled participants to provide detailed written narratives regarding their motivations, experiences, challenges, and aspirations in journalism. These narratives were treated as qualitative transcripts and subjected to thematic and narrative analysis. The use of Google Forms facilitated participation from respondents across various schools and locations in Samar, addressing the logistical challenges associated with face-to-face data collection. To further enrich and clarify the data, selected responses were followed up through Messenger chats and calls. This combination of asynchronous and synchronous data collection methods enhanced both accessibility and data quality while ensuring adherence to ethical standards, including confidentiality and informed consent.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was established through data triangulation, using insights from both student journalists and campus journalism advisers. Detailed descriptions supported transferability, while a clear record of coding choices and procedures improved reliability and confirmability.

Reflexivity

The researcher's background in communication studies and knowledge of campus journalism shaped the inquiry but also introduced potential bias. A reflective journal was kept throughout the process to evaluate assumptions, ensuring that participants' voices influenced the interpretation of findings.

Interview Protocol

Questions

For Student Journalists:

Can you tell me how you got involved in campus journalism?

What roles or positions have you taken in your school publication?

What do you enjoy most about being a campus journalist?

How did participating in activities like DSPC/NSSPC influence you?

Have you ever dreamed of becoming a professional journalist, broadcaster, or writer? Why?

How do you imagine your future career? Do you see yourself working in media or communication?

Who or what inspired you to pursue (or consider) a journalism-related career?

Are there journalism or broadcasting courses available in colleges/ universities near your area?

How do you feel about the fact that journalism is not offered in local universities?

What factors (e.g., finances, family support, location) make it difficult for you to pursue a media-related degree?

If you cannot take up journalism in college, what other course or career are you planning to pursue?

Have you considered joining college publications, community radio, or content creation as an alternative?

Are you aware of university radio in the locale? Would you be interested in using it as a platform to develop journalism skills?

What support do you wish schools or universities could offer to help students like you pursue media careers?

What advice would you give to future student journalists in Samar who share your dreams?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your journey or hopes as a campus writer?

—

For Campus Journalism Mentor, Coach, Trainer:

How would you describe the interest and participation of students in campus journalism?

Do your student writers often express interest in pursuing journalism or broadcasting in college?

How do you think the lack of journalism programs in local HEIs affects their motivation or plans?

What alternative courses or opportunities do your students tend to pursue instead?

Do you think the local university radio or similar platforms could help sustain their interest in journalism?

Data Analysis

This study used a combination of narrative and thematic analysis to explore the experiences and goals of campus journalists and their mentors in Samar. Thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke's six-step framework (as adapted by Caulfield, 2020) helped identify patterns in the data. Narrative analysis kept the coherence, order, and context of individual stories intact. The inclusion of narratives from mentors, coaches, and trainers acted as supportive accounts, validating and enriching the themes from the student journalists' stories.

The researcher gratefully acknowledges the use of ChatGPT by OpenAI as a supplementary tool in assisting to organize qualitative reflections and refining the presentation of the analysis. All interpretation, coding, and synthesis of themes remain the sole responsibility of the researcher.

4. Results and Discussion

The results present findings from the written narratives of basic education students involved in campus journalism. The findings revolved around four key themes drawn from the combined narrative and thematic analysis. Each theme cites examples from student journalists (coded as SJ01, SJ02, etc.) and supportive by narratives from mentors, coaches, and trainers (coded as MCT A & MCT B). These findings interpreted relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, including Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and media literacy perspectives. For a neat presentation of results, meaningful themes are categorized into *A. Student Journalists' Perspectives*, and *B. Mentor/ Coach/ Trainer's Insights*. Category A presents the significant narratives of student journalists, while category B provides the confirmatory

narrative of the two mentors to the emergent themes.

students; one also taught Grade School and College students.

Participants Characteristics

A total of 11 individuals took part in the study, as shown in Table 1. This group included two campus journalism advisers and nine student journalists. The adviser participants were one Senior High School (SHS) Teacher I and one Education Program Supervisor (EPS). Each had at least four years of experience mentoring in campus journalism. One adviser acted as a school paper adviser, while the other worked as a coach, mentor, and trainer for journalism competitions. Both advisers worked with Junior High School and Senior High School

The perspectives shared by both advisers and student journalists offered valuable insights into the motivations, goals, and challenges that shape campus journalism in Samar. Thematic analysis of their narratives uncovered four main themes: (1) External Influences and Internal Motivations, (2) Aspirations and Realities in Media Futures, (3) Barriers to Accessing Journalism Education, and (4) Adaptive Pursuits in Media Aspirations. These themes are discussed in detail in the following subsections, along with quotations that illustrate each finding.

Table 1. Summary Table of Participants Characteristics

Characteristic	Advisers (n=2)	Student Journalists (n=9)
Age, years, M ± SD	-	16.8 ± 1.39
Sex, female, n (%)	-	5 (55.6)
Position/Designation, n (%)	SHS Teacher I: 1 (50.0) EPS II: 1 (50.0)	-
Role in Campus Journalism, n (%)	School Paper Adviser: 1 (50.0) Coach/Mentor/Trainer: 1 (50.0)	-
Education Level, n (%)	-	Senior High School (Grades 11–12): 7 (77.8) College/University: 2 (22.2)
Years as Adviser / in Journalism, n (%)	4–6 years: 1 (50.0) More than 6 years: 1 (50.0)	4 years: 2 (22.2) 5 years: 2 (22.2) 6 years: 1 (11.1) 7 years: 2 (22.2) 8 years: 2 (22.2)
*Grade Levels Handled, n (%) **	Junior High School: 2 (100.0) Senior High School: 2 (100.0) Grade School: 1 (50.0) College: 1 (50.0)	16.8 ± 1.39

Legend: Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; SHS = Senior High School; EPS = Education Program Supervisor. *Percentages for grade levels exceed 100% because advisers may handle multiple levels. Student journalist participants had a mean age of 16.8 years (SD = 1.39), with five females (55.6%) and four males (44.4%). Most were enrolled in Senior High School (n = 7, 77.8%), while two were college students (22.2%). Their journalism experience ranged from four to eight years, with the most common roles including anchor, video editor, editorial cartoonist, photojournalist, and associate editor.

Table 2. Central themes, key concepts from student journalists’ and mentor/ coach, trainer’s responses, and supporting quotes

Themes	Key Concepts and Supporting Statements
<p>External Influences and Internal Motivations</p>	<p>Key Concept: Student journalists were influenced and motivated by both external and internal factors</p> <p>Supporting Statements: <i>“I was selected to be a member of my old school's publication, The Herald honed my skills for broadcasting and writing (specifically feature).”</i> (Excerpt 1, SJ01, Line 7-8, Page 1, Transcript 1)</p> <p><i>“Back in 6th grade, my adviser scouted me to be a part of the radio broadcasting group, as well as to be a feature writer. I was mostly influenced by my friends who also were a part of the school publication so I joined as well.”</i> (Excerpt 3, SJ07, Line 7-9, Page 1, Transcript 7)</p> <p><i>“Spark of interest in writing and news reporting in elementary.”</i> (Excerpt 2, SJ02, Line 7, Page 1, Transcript 2)</p>
<p>Aspirations and Realities in Media Futures</p>	<p>Key Concept: Participants aspire to pursue journalism shaped by early exposure, but acknowledge the disconnect between dreams and the limited academic opportunities locally.</p> <p>Supporting Statements: <i>“It is not something I have initially wanted to become since I had a lot more options back then, but given my experiences, it is something I have been considering recently”</i> (Excerpt 27, SJ01, Line 19-20, Page 1, Transcript 1)</p> <p><i>“...currently deciding on what course to take in college, and media/communication have been among the first in my options... I need to go someplace else just for my media-related course that I want.”</i> (Excerpt 39, SJ02, Line 21-22, 31, Page 1, Transcript 2)</p>
<p>Barriers to Accessing Journalism Education</p>	<p>Key Concept: Student journalists highlighted several barriers to accessing journalism in the locale</p> <p>Supporting Statements: <i>“To my knowledge, there are barely any journalism-adjacent courses/programs near me.”</i> (Excerpt 52, SJ06, Line 42, Page 2, Transcript 6)</p> <p><i>“I feel like it does not give much of an opportunity to student journalists who want to pursue a journalism-related career.”</i> (Excerpt 55 SJ01, Line 32-33, Page 1, Transcript 1)</p> <p><i>“I think it's location. As I've noticed, a lot of my classmates pursue their dreams in other places...”</i> (Excerpt 59, SJ04, Line 34-36, Page 1, Transcript 4)</p> <p><i>“A factor that makes it difficult is the job opportunities. Whether we like it or not, there is no denying that the Philippines favor STEM-inclined jobs in comparison to the humanities and media. This results to the stigma.”</i> (Excerpt 64, SJ08, Line 37-39, Page 1, Transcript 8)</p>
<p>Adaptive Pursuits in Media Aspirations</p>	<p>Key Concept: Despite limitations, students shared how they pursue their media interests through other avenues</p> <p>Supporting Statements: <i>“Currently, I am part of our University’s student publication. Additionally, I have made attempts to make online journalistic content on my own.”</i>(Excerpt 75, SJ06, Line 56-57, Page 1, Transcript 6)</p> <p><i>“I am planning on joining UP Vista, the school publication, if I have the chance...”</i> (Excerpt 76, SJ08, Line 44, Page 1, Transcript 8)</p>

Theme 1. External Influences and Internal Motivations

This theme explores how external influences and internal motivations drive students to engage in campus journalism. Based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the findings reveal that social support and personal goals help maintain involvement.

Students' entry into campus journalism was often the result of social encouragement from advisers and peers, paired with intrinsic motivations for self-expression and advocacy. As one student recalled, "I was scouted by my adviser back in 6th grade... I was mostly influenced by my friends who were part of the school publication" (SJ07). Another shared, "Spark of interest in writing and news reporting in elementary" (SJ02). These narratives align with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, where modeling and reinforcement shape career interests. Mentors confirmed the power of competitions in attracting students. However, they expressed concern over the depth of commitment: "Most of them are passionate about the thought of winning... but only a few have the heart for it" (MCT A). The juxtaposition of these perspectives suggests that while external influences effectively draw students into journalism, sustained engagement requires mentorship that cultivates purpose beyond competitive success.

"I enrolled in Campus Journalism, and studied junior high school in a special program but only joined a competition for 1 year."(Excerpt 7, SJ04, Line 7-8, Page 1, Transcript 4)

"It started with my love for the thrill of competitions"(Excerpt 8, SJ06, Line 19, Page 1, Transcript 6)

"The ability to speak my mind and my perspective regarding prevalent issues and topics plaguing our country. It makes me (as a student) feel validated and heard, also the friendships and bonds that I have formed along the way has also been enjoyable". (Excerpt 22, SJ07, Line 13-15, Page 1, Transcript 7)

Teachers shared that top-performing students tend to show more interest in journalism. *"Not all are interested... only the top-performing students."*(Excerpt 26, MCT b, Line 10, Page 1, Transcript 11)

Theme 2. Aspirations and Realities in Media Futures

This theme looks into the changing aspirations of young journalists as they balance personal interests, social influences, and structural limitations. Grounded in theories like Possible Selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), Social Learning (Krumboltz), and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), the findings emphasize how early exposure, mentorship, and socio-economic factors shape career views.

Students envisioned themselves in future media roles, often inspired by the profession's social impact. One student explained, "Be a defender of truth" (SJ09), while another aspired to "be a video journalist or editor at a high-end broadcasting network like ABS-CBN or GMA" (SJ02). These aspirations reflect which emphasizes meaning-making in Construction Theory. career choice. Savickas' Career Nevertheless, mentors highlighted that aspirations are often tempered by the absence of local programs, forcing compromises: "...she just settled for pursuing BSED English" (MCT A). This

illustrates a tension between students' idealistic visions and the structural realities mentors navigate with them. Without accessible academic pathways, dreams risk becoming deferred or reshaped entirely.

Student Journalists' Perspectives

"I am in a state where I am currently deciding on what course to take in college, and media/communication have been among the first in my options." (Excerpt 29, SJ02, Line 20-21, Page 1, Transcript 2)

Both coaches affirmed that some students express interest in pursuing journalism-related careers and inquire about DevCom or Media courses. MCT A noted that while students aim for programs like DevCom, constraints often force them to choose BSED English or similar tracks.

"...she just settled pursuing BSED English..." (Excerpt 49, MCT A, Line 22, Page 2, Transcript 10)

"Yes, some of them [express interest]." (Excerpt 50, MCT B, Line 13, Page 2, Transcript 11)

The narratives above reinforce the subthemes about "Tension Between Passion and Practical Career Considerations" and "Evolving Aspirations" due to limited choices. Coaches highlighted that while passion exists, economic and institutional barriers lead students toward more attainable options.

Theme 3. Barriers to Accessing Journalism Education

This theme uncovers the structural, emotional, and socio-cultural challenges that prevent campus journalists from pursuing formal journalism or communication

degrees. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the findings show how institutional gaps, financial issues, and societal views come together to limit opportunities.

Both students and mentors identified the absence of local journalism programs, financial constraints, and geographic isolation as the most significant hurdles. Students voiced disappointment: "There are barely any journalism-adjacent programs near me" (SJ06) and "It seems like a wasted opportunity... if many state universities added it, it may lessen the stigma around these courses" (SJ08). These frustrations align with Markus and Nurius's possible selves theory which states that envisioned futures are constrained by structural barriers. Mentors corroborated the systemic nature of these limitations: "The lack of journalism programs significantly affects the motivation, direction, and plans of students" (MCT B). The convergence of perspectives reinforces that addressing this gap requires institutional reform, not just individual perseverance.

Students expressed frustration and disappointment over the gap between their passions and the educational options available. These emotional responses reflect Markus and Nurius' (1986) Possible Selves theory.

"Quite disappointing... journalism scene is strong." {Excerpt 61, SJ06, Line 44-45, Page 2, Transcript 6)

"It is kinda sad, but I think there should be journalism so students can still pursue their passion for writing and news related." (Excerpt 58, SJ02, Line 27-28, Page 1, Transcript 2)

“Since media careers are sometimes unavailable in some areas, I believe it would be better if universities could offer courses that would reach the student-journalists who wish to pursue such careers but unfortunately cannot.”(Excerpt 65, SJ01, Line 49-51, Page 1, Transcript 1)

MCT A and B both explicitly stated that the lack of local journalism programs hampers students’ choices, affects motivation, and forces them to settle for allied courses.

“The lack of programs delimits students’ options... they settle for less...”(Excerpt 71, MCT A, Line 20-22, Page 1, Transcript 10)

The anecdotes from advisers ground the students' frustrations in institutional realities. Coaches saw firsthand how dreams are adjusted or deferred.

Theme 4. Adaptive Pursuits in Media Aspirations

This theme explores how student journalists, in the absence of formal journalism programs, engage in adaptive and advocacy-driven efforts to sustain their media aspirations. These calls for institutional reform reflect high levels of resilience and agency. Anchored in Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory and supported by Super’s (1990) Life-Span, Life-Space Theory and Critical Media Literacy, the findings show how students creatively navigate systemic gaps and assert their place in media spaces.

Despite formal limitations, students demonstrated resilience and adaptability by pursuing journalism through alternative platforms. As one shared, “Currently I am

part of our university’s student publication... I have made attempts to make online journalistic content” (SJ06). Others called for greater institutional support: “I wish schools would give more funding to publications” (SJ07). These adaptive strategies reflect Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy, where individuals take proactive steps despite barriers. Mentors recognized the value of alternative platforms like university radio: “Exposure to these experiences sparks interest” (MCT A). However, they saw these as supplements rather than substitutes for formal training. The synergy between students’ grassroots initiatives and mentors’ institutional perspectives points toward a blended model that combines formal programs with sustained support for alternative media spaces.

“I am planning on joining UP Vista, the school publication, if I have the chance.” (Excerpt 76, SJ08, Line 44, Page 1, Transcript 8)

Beyond curriculum expansion, students advocate for funding, freedom, and institutional recognition of student media. This reflects their desire not only to participate in journalism, but to reshape how youth voices are valued and supported. This also aligns with Critical Media Literacy, which emphasizes the political and transformative role of youth in media engagement (Kellner & Share, 2007).

“I wish that academic institutions can also be more lenient with how student publications operate...”(Excerpt 81, SJ06, P4, Line 56-57, Page 1, Transcript 6)

“I wish schools would give more funding to publications...”(Excerpt

82, P6, P4, Line 56-57, Page 1, Transcript 6)

Coaches acknowledged that platforms like SSU Radio could help sustain student interest in journalism beyond competitions.

“Yes, SSU Radio can help sustain interest”.(Excerpt 85, MCT B, Line 22 , Page 1, Transcript 1-)

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Campus journalism in Samar is both a formative space for self-expression and advocacy, and a space where young people confront the realities of limited educational pathways. Students’ narratives reveal that early mentorship, peer influence, and a passion for truth-telling shape their journalistic identities, while mentors’ perspectives underscore the importance of nurturing commitment beyond competition. The convergence of these voices paints a picture of deep enthusiasm tempered by structural barriers chiefly the absence of local journalism programs, financial constraints, and geographic isolation.

However, the resilience shown by student journalists in seeking alternative platforms such as school publications, online content creation, and community media demonstrates a capacity to adapt and sustain their aspirations despite systemic constraints. This adaptability reflects a shared belief, from both students and mentors, that journalism remains a powerful avenue for civic engagement and social change.

For journalism education in underserved regions like Samar, the challenge is not only to inspire but also to

provide tangible, locally accessible pathways. Expanding academic offerings, enhancing mentorship, and strengthening alternative platforms are critical steps to ensure that the aspirations of young journalists do not remain unfulfilled ideals but evolve into viable, impactful careers. In doing so, institutions, policymakers, and communities can transform the passion of these campus journalists into a sustained force for ethical, engaged, and community-rooted media practice.

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